
Writing Freedom's History

BY IRA BERLIN • BARBARA J. FIELDS • JOSEPH P. REIDY • LESLIE S. ROWLAND

No event in American history matches the drama of emancipation. More than a century later, it continues to stir the deepest emotions. And properly so. Born of one of the bloodiest wars in a warlike era, clothed in the rhetoric of biblical prophecy and national destiny, emancipation accomplished a profound social revolution. That revolution destroyed forever a way of life based upon the ownership of human beings, surrendering to the former slaves proprietorship of their own persons, liquidating without compensation private property valued at billions of dollars, and forcibly substituting the relations of free labor for those of slavery. In designating the former slaves as citizens, it placed citizenship upon new ground, defined in the federal Constitution and thenceforth removed beyond the jurisdiction of the states. By wiping out the sovereignty of master over slave, it handed a monopoly of sovereignty to the newly consolidated nation-state. The freeing of the slaves simultaneously overturned the old regime of the South and set the entire nation upon a new course.

As the war for Union became a war for liberty, the lives of slaves and freedpeople became increasingly intertwined with the activities of both the Union and Confederate governments. Following the war, federal agencies continued to figure prominently in the reconstruction of the economy and society of the South. The records created and collected by the agencies of these

governments, and now housed in the National Archives of the United States, provide an unrivaled source of documentation for understanding the passage of black people from slavery to freedom.

The missions of these agencies placed them in close contact with ordinary people of all sorts, and their bureaucratic structure provided a mechanism for the preservation of many records of people generally dismissed as historically mute. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) illustrates the point. Although the bureau often lacked resources to do more than make written note of the abuses of freedpeople brought to its attention, bureau agents scattered across the South conducted censuses, undertook investigations, recorded depositions, filed reports, and accumulated letters authored by ex-slaves and interested whites. Other agencies whose duties focused less directly upon the concerns of former slaves created thousands of similar, though more dispersed, records.

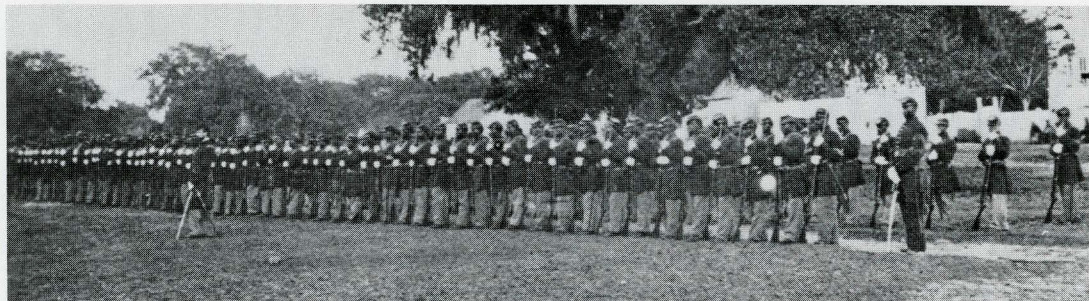
In these archival files, alongside official records, hundreds of letters and statements by former slaves give voice to people whose aspirations, beliefs, and behavior have gone largely unrecorded. Not only did extraordinary numbers of ex-slaves, many of them newly literate, put pen to paper in the early years of freedom, but hundreds of others, entirely illiterate, gave depositions to government officials, placed their marks on resolutions passed at mass meetings, testified before courts-martial and Freedmen's Bureau courts, and dictated letters to more literate blacks and to white officials and teachers. The written record thus created constitutes an unparalleled outpouring from people caught up in the emancipation process. Predictably, many of these documents requested official action to redress wrongs committed by powerful former slaveholders who only reluctantly recognized

© 1982 by Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, taken from *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation* to be published by Cambridge University Press.

Ira Berlin, editor of *Freedom*, teaches at the University of Maryland and is the author of the prize-winning volume, *Slaves without Masters: the Free Negro in the Ante-Bellum South*.

Barbara J. Fields, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland are associate editors of *Freedom* and specialists in the history of slavery and emancipation.

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The First Carolina Negro Troops assembled for dress review.

ex-slaves as free, and rarely as equal. Others, however, originated in relationships entirely outside the purview of either federal officials or white former masters and employers. They include, for example, correspondence between black soldiers and their families and between kinfolk who had been separated during slavery. That such letters fell for various reasons into the bureaucratic net of government agencies (and thus were preserved along with official records) should not obscure their deeply personal origins.

Selected out of the masses of purely administrative records, these documents convey, perhaps as no historian can, the experiences of the liberated: the quiet personal satisfaction of meeting an old master on equal terms, as well as the outrage of ejection from a segregated street car; the elation of a fugitive enlisting in the Union army, and the humiliation of a laborer cheated out of hard-earned wages; the joy of a family reunion after years of forced separation, and the distress of having a child involuntarily apprenticed to a former owner; the hope that freedom would bring a new world, and the fear that, in so many ways, life would be much as before. Similar records offer insight into the equally diverse reactions of planters, Union officers, and Southern yeomen—men and women who faced emancipation with different interests and expectations. Taken together, these records provide the fullest documentation of the release of any people from bondage and the consequent transformation of an entire society. As far as is known, no comparable record exists for the liberation of any other group of slaves or serfs.

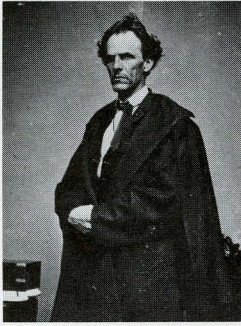
Beginning in 1976, the Freedmen and Southern Society Project began a systematic search of the records in the National Archives, with a view toward publishing a multivolume documentary history of emancipation. Supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the project represented a new departure in the history of NHPRC-sponsored

projects. Instead of focusing upon the life of an individual, the Freedmen and Southern Society Project aimed to document the history of a social process: the destruction of slavery and the transition to freedom. For three years the project staff combed Archives records for suitable material. The records of the Freedmen's Bureau proved particularly rich, but other War Department records, such as those of the Secretary of War, the Adjutant General's Office, the U.S. Army continental commands, and the War Department's collection of Confederate records, were also valuable. Records of other government agencies, especially those of Congress and the Treasury Department, similarly contained rich material on emancipation. In 1979, the project staff moved from the Archives to the University of Maryland at College Park, where the task of editing and annotating the documents has since proceeded.

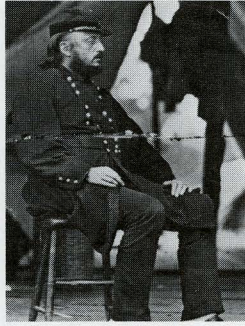
The editors of the Freeman and Southern Society Project will publish a multivolume study entitled *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*. The volumes will be arranged in series that reflect broadly defined aspects of the emancipation process.

- Series I *The Destruction of Slavery and the Rise of the New Order*
- Series II *The Black Military Experience*
- Series III *Land, Capital, and Labor*
- Series IV *Race Relations, Violence, Law and Justice*
- Series V *The Black Community: Family, Church, School, and Society*

Each volume will be organized topically, with related documents appearing together, accompanied by original interpretive essays. Cambridge University Press will publish Series II: *The Black Military Experience* in the fall and additional volumes will be published over the next several years. The essay and documents that follow, "Fighting on Two Fronts: The Struggle for Equal Pay," is drawn from *The Black Military Experience*.



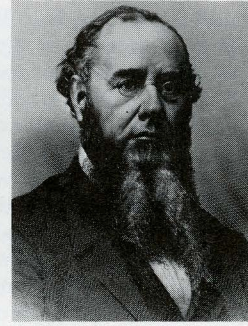
James H. Lane



Benjamin F. Butler



David Hunter



Edwin M. Stanton

“Fighting on Two Fronts: The Struggle for Equal Pay”

In the early years of the war, when blacks and their abolitionist allies first petitioned for the recruitment of black freemen and slaves in the Union army, they gave little consideration to the question of treatment after muster. Black military service offered the opportunity to strike a blow against slavery and to lay the groundwork for the reconstruction of the Republic on the basis of racial equality. Drawn by these heady possibilities and forced to fend off imputations of black docility and cowardice, proenlistment strategists did not foresee that military service would itself bear the stain of the inequality they hoped to eradicate.¹

Blacks understood that they had a special interest in the outcome of the war that white soldiers could not claim. Nonetheless, they expected to share every material aspect of soldierly life on an equal footing with whites. The first recruiters of black troops—notably Senator James H. Lane in Kansas, Gen. Benjamin F. Butler in Louisiana, and Generals David Hunter and Rufus Saxton in South Carolina—promised such equality, as did Massachusetts governor John A. Andrew. On the basis of Andrew’s reported assurances from Secretary of War Edwin

M. Stanton, the governors of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Ohio, and other Northern states made similar promises.² The federal government ultimately violated virtually every pledge of equal treatment, but no transgression caused as much hardship or so blatantly insulted the dignity of black soldiers as the policy of discriminatory pay.

The general poverty of the black community made the pay question an especially sensitive issue. Most Northern freemen toiled as day laborers and owned little property. Probably many had never earned more than the thirteen dollars per month, plus clothing allowance, that the army offered white volunteers.³ Newly emancipated slaves were even more impoverished, since few escaped bondage with more than the clothes on their backs. Black soldiers therefore needed regular wages to support themselves and their families, and a few extra dollars a month could mean the difference between subsistence and destitution. Although few blacks enlisted solely for the money, their expectation of soldiers’ wages reinforced their aspiration for equality. Poverty and principle proved an explosive mixture.

Under such circumstances, black soldiers felt betrayed by the decision of the War Department, early in June 1863, to pay them three dollars less per month than white soldiers, and to deduct from the remaining ten dollars an additional three dollars for clothing.⁴ In justifying its policy, the War Department cited recent congress-

¹Published accounts of the pay struggle include: Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1869), pp. 280-292; Joseph T. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion 1861-1865* (1888), pp. 151-160; Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865*, 2d ed. (1894); Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (1956), pp. 181-196; James M. McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (1965), chap. 14; Herman Belz, “Law, Politics, and Race in the Struggle for Equal Pay During the Civil War,” *Civil War History* 22 (Sept. 1976):197-222.

²See, for example, John A. Andrew to John Wilder, May 23, 1863, *Negro in the Military Service*, pp. 1264-1265, ser. 390, Colored Troops Division, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1780’s-1917, Record Group 94, National Archives (hereinafter cited as RG 94, NA); David Tod to E. M. Stanton, June 26, July 14 and 18, 1863, *Telegrams Collected by the Office of the Secretary of War* (Bound), Record Group 107, National Archives.

³U.S. War Department, *Revised United States Army Regulations* (1863), (hereinafter cited as *Revised Army Regulations*), pp. 361-362 (for pay); *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170, 517 (for clothing allowance).

⁴U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128

sional legislation. Two 1862 acts, the Militia Act and the Confiscation Act, authorized the president to use blacks in national service, but only the former fixed a standard of pay.⁵ Reasoning that black enlistments fell under the provisions of the Militia Act, which expressly authorized black military service, rather than the Confiscation Act, which applied more generally to any employment contrabands, the department decided to pay the soldiers ten dollars per month, as stipulated by the former. The department ignored its own pledges of equal pay, as well as those of Hunter, Butler, Andrew, and others. The War Department also overlooked the March 1863 Enrollment Act's guarantee of pay on a par with volunteers for drafted men, even though some Northern blacks were being drafted.⁶ The meager army pay appeared all the more inequitable because black civilians working for military departments could earn as much as twenty-five dollars monthly by virtue of the lack of pay restrictions in the Confiscation Act.

The government's default on its pledge to pay black recruits at the same rate as whites deeply insulted black soldiers and their officers. It challenged their rights as citizens at a time when they assumed that military service would affirm racial equality. It revealed starkly that racial prejudice pervaded Northern as well as Southern society. The pay question generated an awareness that black soldiers had to fight two wars: one against Southern secession, the other against Northern discrimination.

The decision to pay black soldiers according to the restrictive provisions of the Militia Act fell with special intensity upon black noncommissioned officers. Promotion above the rank of private earned them no added monthly pay; they received only the ten dollars specified by the Militia Act for all black soldiers. Meanwhile, white privates and corporals earned thirteen dollars per month; company sergeants, seventeen dollars; first sergeants, twenty dollars; and regimental sergeants, twenty-one dollars.⁷ The white officers who organized and commanded black regiments lamented the stultifying effect of uniform pay for blacks upon the development

of a black noncommissioned officer corps. Black men in the noncommissioned ranks not only shared that perspective, but also felt the sting of the discriminatory pay provision in monetary terms and smarted at the knowledge that the highest-ranking black sergeant earned less than a white private. Like all black soldiers, they condemned the policy that consigned them to inferior status purely on account of their ancestry. Taking advantage of their wider literacy, black noncommissioned officers penned memorials that swelled the larger chorus of protests emanating from the black enlisted ranks.

The War Department's decision also affected the black commissioned officers serving in the Department of the Gulf. Although Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks maneuvered to eliminate them from the officer corps, he permitted black officers to draw the same pay as their white counterparts as long as they remained in service. When the War Department announced its policy of paying all blacks only ten dollars per month, black officers sent an indignant protest to the secretary of war; but the lower rate stood.⁸ The War Department similarly refused black surgeons and chaplains payment on a par with whites of the same rank. Like all blacks affected by the policy, surgeons and chaplains denounced discriminatory treatment.

The 54th Massachusetts Regiment, recruited from all over the North by Governor Andrew on the promise of equality, sprang to action first. Sent to South Carolina in May 1863 for service under the sympathetic General Hunter, the regiment had not received any pay whatsoever by July. Col. Robert G. Shaw, who died late in July in the assault on Fort Wagner, informed Governor Andrew at the beginning of the month that he would prohibit paymasters from distributing the inferior ten dollar monthly compensation. Rather, he demanded that his men be mustered out of service.⁹ After they had proved their mettle at Fort Wagner, the men themselves also refused to accept discriminatory pay. They further rejected Andrew's offer to use state funds to make up the difference between what he had promised and what the War Department offered. Most felt insulted that Andrew should think their objection a matter of money rather than of principle. A deputation from the governor in December 1863 could not shake the men's determination, and they reaffirmed their resolve to accept nothing less than equal pay from the War Department.

vols. (1880-1901), (hereinafter cited as *Official Records*), ser. 3, vol. 3, p. 252.

⁵Both acts were approved July 17, 1862. The relevant sections are section 11 of the Confiscation Act and sections 12, 13, and 15 of the Militia Act. (*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pp. 276, 281-282).

⁶Section 11 of the Enrollment Act stated "That all persons thus enrolled . . . when called into service shall be placed on the same footing, in all respects, as volunteers for three years, or during the war, including advance pay and bounty as now provided by law" (*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 3, p. 90).

⁷*Revised Army Regulations*, pp. 358-363.

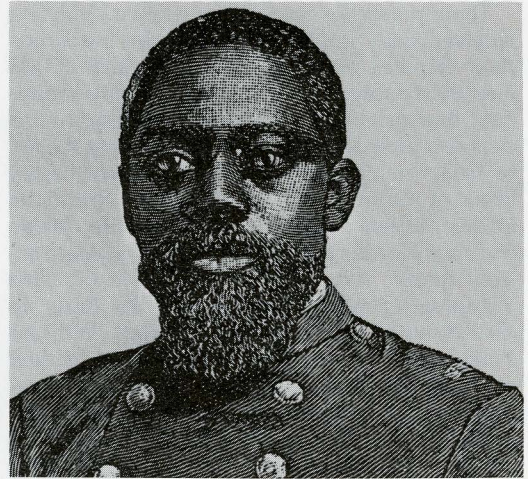
⁸Capt. P. B. S. Pinchback et al. to Honorable Edwin M. Stanton, [Oct. 1863], G-104 1863, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94, NA.

⁹Robert G. Shaw to Governor Andrew, July 2, 1863, in Emilio, *Fifty-fourth Regiment*, pp. 47-48.

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General Nathaniel Banks



Black officer of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment.

The Massachusetts soldiers' protest began as a result of the betrayal of the promise of equal pay made at the time they enlisted. As vast numbers of black volunteers entered the service during the second half of 1863, they, too, viewed the matter of discriminatory pay as a stigma of inferiority and protested against it. Yet no black soldiers matched the level of opposition expressed by the early regiments. Like the Northern units, the South Carolina regiments had enlisted under express War Department guarantees of equal pay; and, even more galling, they had drawn at least one payment at the regular volunteer rate before the lower pay standard for black troops went into effect.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, therefore, opposition to the discriminatory pay policy centered in the South Carolina Sea Islands, where both the Massachusetts and South Carolina black regiments served. As the Massachusetts protest intensified during the summer and fall of 1863, the South Carolina troops kept pace. Laying specific claim to Secretary of War Stanton's written promise of equal pay, they and their officers petitioned the War Department to reinstate the equal rate of thirteen dollars per month. When the War Department did not satisfy the claim, they too took a stand on principles and refused to accept the ten dollars offered them.

¹⁰On Aug. 25, 1862, Secretary of War Stanton authorized Gen. Rufus Saxton to enlist 5,000 black troops, and expressly indicated that such soldiers should "receive the same pay and rations as are allowed by law to volunteers in the service" (*Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 14, p. 377). Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew maintained that Stanton had given him verbal assurances to the same effect (see *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation* [1982], ser. 2, doc. 28), but Stanton's letter to Saxton is the only written War Department promise of equal pay to the early black regiments.

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Their principles proved expensive. Soldiers received daily letters describing the hardships their families endured. Many learned of kin lodged in poorhouses for want of money to support themselves. Such reports shortened tempers and fueled unrest. For a time during the fall of 1863, the Massachusetts men teetered on the brink of mutiny, and only the most strenuous efforts of their officers averted violence. While freeborn Northerners threatened precipitate action, former slaves in the 3rd South Carolina Volunteers pressed their case to the limit. In mid-November 1863, led by Sgt. William Walker, the men of one company stacked their arms before the tent of their regimental commander, Col. Augustus G. Bennett, and refused to do any further duty until the pay matter was settled in their favor. They adamantly refused to heed Bennett's warning that their action constituted mutiny, punishable by death. Despite his sympathy for their cause, Bennett formally charged the men with mutiny; and in February 1864, a firing squad executed Sergeant Walker in the presence of his entire Brigade.¹¹

Northern black troops felt especially betrayed by the inferior pay policy, and they too protested their discriminatory pay. Michigan soldiers stationed on the Sea Islands in close proximity to the Massachusetts and South Carolina regiments also adopted the tactic of refusing to accept discriminatory pay. On the coast of Texas, the only Rhode Island black regiment, the 14th Heavy Artillery, followed the same course; and in March 1864, their protest ended in tragedy. After the men of one company refused to accept their pay, their commander court-martialed some two dozen privates and noncommissioned officers. Ensuing sentences of imprisonment for as much as one year at hard labor generated seething unrest, which soon erupted in a confrontation between a white lieutenant and a black enlisted man. The lieutenant killed the man on the spot. The regimental commander sustained the officer's action without even a reprimand and placed all the enlisted men under close guard until they capitulated.¹² As long as it remained unsettled, the pay issue exposed and aggravated the entire range of discrimination that blacks experienced in the military and heightened the militance of black soldiers.

Support from high-ranking officers helped sustain the protest in some regiments and fore-

stalled prosecution of larger numbers of angry soldiers. Technically, refusal to accept pay constituted mutiny, which, as both the Walker case and that of the 14th Rhode Island Artillery demonstrated, could meet summary and deadly punishment. Fortunately for the men of their regiments, commanders Robert G. Shaw and Edward N. Hallowell of the 54th Massachusetts, Norwood P. Hallowell and Alfred S. Hartwell of the 55th Massachusetts, James M. Williams of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers, and Thomas W. Higginson of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, as well as Lane and Andrew, all came from abolitionist backgrounds. Similarly, Generals Hunter, Saxton, and Butler had been antislavery men. Furthermore, most regimental commanders, regardless of their backgrounds and despite their opposition to certain tactics of the protesters, endorsed the principle of equal pay. Without such allies, the soldiers' protest would have been arrested at the outset with a few exemplary executions.

In their tenacious pursuit of equality, black soldiers made the pay issue a symbol of the larger struggle for racial justice. Their cause sparked wide reaction throughout the North, mobilizing the entire spectrum of abolitionist opinion, as well as the sympathy and organized efforts of free black communities, in defense of equality. The protest spread as black enlistments escalated. By late 1863, all quarters joined the protest against discriminatory pay. In his annual report to the president in December 1863, even Secretary of War Stanton recommended that Congress remove the binding restrictions of the Militia Act so that black soldiers could collect the same pay as whites.¹³

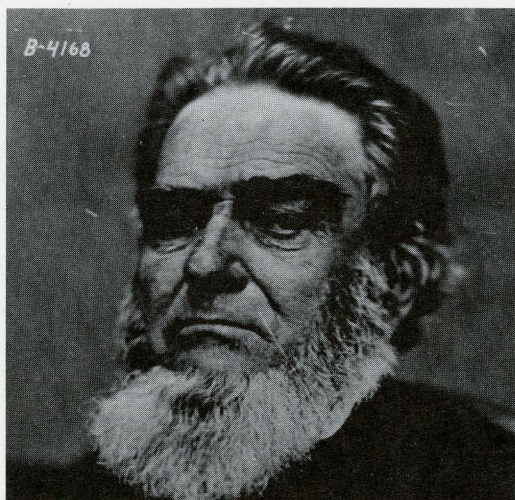
Struggling to settle an issue so potentially explosive, Congress cast about for a solution that would extricate it from the contradictory provisions of the Confiscation and Militia Acts and at the same time offer a measure of justice to black soldiers. In the spring and early summer of 1864, the spirit of insubordination again arose as black soldiers throughout the South, especially the Massachusetts regiments stationed in South Carolina, lost patience with congressional dawdling on the pay issue. While their superiors threatened harsh punishment for insubordinate acts, Colonels Hallowell of the 54th Regiment and Hartwell of the 55th reiterated Colonel Shaw's earlier plea to have the men mustered out of service if the government abrogated its contractual obligation of equal pay; and Hartwell left on a special mission to Washington to plead the case of the black soldiers.¹⁴ In mid-

¹¹Proceedings of general court-martial in the case of Sgt. William Walker, 3rd SC Vols., MM-1320, ser. 15, Court-Martial Case Files, Record Group 153.

¹²Maj. J. J. Comstock, Jr. to Col. Chas. E. Bailey, Apr. 16, 1864, Letters Sent, 11th United States Colored Heavy Artillery, Regimental Books & Papers United States Colored Troops, RG 94, NA.

¹³*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 3, p. 1132.

¹⁴Col. Alfred S. Hartwell to the Secretary of War, June 13,



Edwin Bates, Attorney General in President Lincoln's cabinet, ruled in July 1864 that blacks who were free at the beginning of the Civil War should receive pay equal to whites.

June 1864, Congress at last responded, passing a military appropriations bill that authorized equal pay for all black soldiers retroactive to January 1, 1864, and continuing thereafter. In an attempt to settle the claims of the Northern regiments, the lawmakers also ruled that all black soldiers free on April 19, 1861, when the war began, were entitled to receive the pay allowed by law at the time of their enlistment, leaving to the attorney general the determination of the applicable law. In July 1864, Attorney General Edward Bates ruled that the restrictive Militia Act did not govern the case of the free black soldiers and that the Confiscation Act—by virtue of its absence of pay constraints—provided for pay equal to that of white soldiers, that is, thirteen dollars per month. At the beginning of August, the War Department implemented Bates's ruling and ordered regimental commanders to ascertain, by administering an oath, who of their men had been free at the start of the war.¹⁵ The "Quaker Oath," devised by Colonel

1864, H-407 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94, NA.

¹⁵The pay provisions formed section 2 of the Appropriations Act of June 15, 1864 (*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 4, p. 448). One June 20, 1864, Congress increased the pay of all soldiers, black and white, effective May 1, 1864. A private's compensation rose from thirteen to sixteen dollars per month (*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 4, p. 448). Under these two acts, black privates thus became entitled to receive thirteen dollars per month beginning Jan. 1, 1864, and sixteen dollars per month beginning May 1, 1864. The provisions equalizing the pay of black and white soldiers also allowed black noncommissioned officers for the first time to receive higher pay than privates, at the same rate as white noncommissioned officers of comparable rank. Attorney General Bates announced his opinion on

Hallowell, simply required black soldiers to swear that at the start of the war "no man had the right to demand unrequited labor of you."

The congressional action began to defuse the pay issue, and the 54th and 55th Massachusetts regiments held an ecstatic celebration of their victory.¹⁶ The freedmen's sweet success, however, had a bitter taste to soldiers who had been slaves when the war began. They deeply resented the April 19th clause. The South Carolina regiments—those with the strongest case for equal pay—took no pleasure in seeing their claim annihilated on an arbitrary technicality. They continued, therefore, to press their demand, refusing to accept any pay for another nine months.

In a March 1865 enrollment act, Congress finally acknowledged Stanton's August 1862 order to Saxton as contractually binding on the War Department, and recognized as legitimate the claim to equal pay from day of enlistment of the South Carolina regiments.¹⁷ The legislation also empowered the secretary of war to decide similar cases on an individual basis. Three months later, in reply to a petition from the Kansas officers, the department ruled against Lane's regiment, presumably on the grounds that Lane lacked proper authority to offer equal pay at the time he organized the regiment. That decision closed the Kansas soldiers' case.¹⁸

By virtue of its policy of inequality, the Union government inadvertently enriched the black military experience. Unequal pay incited black soldiers to challenge discrimination with the same vigor and determination they used to fight slavery. The issue united soldiers of various backgrounds in a common struggle, even though it did not necessarily abolish perceived differences between freeborn and slaveborn. The struggle produced leaders from among the ranks and captured the support of Northern black communities and segments of white public opinion, both in Washington and throughout the North. In turn, the protest, and its largely successful outcome, shaped the thoughts and actions of black soldiers returning home to commence a new struggle for freedom. □

July 14, 1864; and the War Department implemented the decision about the pay due to free black soldiers in Circular No. 60, issued Aug. 1, 1864. (*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 4, pp. 490-493, 564-565.)

¹⁶*Christian Recorder*, Nov. 12, 1864; Emilio, *Fifty-fourth Regiment*, pp. 227-228.

¹⁷Section 5 of the Enrollment Act of Mar. 3, 1865, provided for retroactive equal pay to those regiments enlisted under explicit presidential or War Department promise to that effect. (*Official Records*, ser. 3, vol. 4, p. 1223.)

¹⁸Col. J. M. Williams et al. to Secretary of War, July 5, 1865, W-558 1865, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94, NA.

1. Massachusetts Black Corporal to the President

Morris Island [S.C.]. Sept 28th 1863.

Your Excellency will pardon the presumption of an humble individual like myself, in addressing you. but the earnest Solicitation of my Comrades in Arms, besides the genuine interest felt by myself in the matter is my excuse, for placing before the Executive head of the Nation our Common Grievance: On the 6th of the last Month, the Paymaster of the department, informed us, that if we would decide to receive the sum of \$10 (ten dollars) per month, he would come and pay us that sum, but, that, on the sitting of Congress, the Regt would, in his opinion, be *allowed* the other 3 (three.) He did not give us any guarantee that this would be, as he hoped, certainly *he* had no authority for making any such guarantee, and we can not suppose him acting in any way interested. Now the main question is. Are we *Soldiers*, or are we LABOURERS. We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various Duties, pertaining to a Soldiers life, have conducted ourselves, to the complete satisfaction of General Officers, who, were if any, prejudiced *against* us, but who now accord us all the encouragement, and honour due us: have shared the perils, and Labour, of Reducing the first stronghold, that flaunted a Traitor Flag: and more, Mr President. Today, the Anglo Saxon Mother, Wife, or Sister, are not alone, in tears for departed Sons, Husbands, and Brothers. The patient Trusting Decendants of Africs Clime, have dyed the ground with blood, in defense of the Union, and Democracy. Men too your Excellency, who know in a measure, the cruelties of the Iron heel of oppression, which in years gone by, the very Power, their blood is now being spilled to maintain, ever ground them to the dust. But When the war trumpet sounded o'er the land, when men knew not the Friend from the Traitor, the Black man laid his life at the Altar of the Nation,—and he was refused. When the arms of the Union, were beaten, in the first year of the War, And the Executive called more food. for its ravaging maw, again the black man begged, the privelege of Aiding his Country in her need, to be again refused, And now, he is in the War: and how has he conducted himself? Let their dusky forms, rise up, out the mires of James Island, and give the answer. Let the rich mould around Wagners parapets be upturned, and there will be found an Eloquent answer. Obedient and patient, and Solid as a wall are they. all we lack, is a paler hue, and a better acquaintance with the Alphabet. Now Your Ex-

cellency, We have done a Soldiers Duty. Why cant we have a Soldiers pay? You caution the Rebel Chieftain, that the United States, knows, no distinction, in her Soldiers: She insists on having all her Soldiers, of whatever, creed or Color, to be treated, according to the usages of War. Now if the United States exacts uniformity of treatment of her Soldiers, from the Insurgents, would it not be well, and consistent, to set the example herself, by paying all her *Soldiers* alike? We of this Regt. were not enlisted under any "contraband" act. But we do not wish to be understood, as rating our Service, of more Value to the Government, than the service of the exslave, Their Service *is* undoubtedly worth much to the Nation, but Congress made express, provision touching their case, as slaves freed by military necessity, and assuming the Government, to be their temporary Gaurdian:—Not so with us—Freemen by birth, and consequently, having the advantage of *thinking*, and acting for ourselves, so far as the Laws would allow us. We do not consider ourselves fit subjects for the Contraband act. We appeal to You, Sir: as the Executive of the Nation, to have us Justly Dealt with. The Regt, do pray, that they be assured their service will be fairly appreciated, by paying them as american SOLDIERS, not as menial hierlings. Black men You may well know, are poor, three dollars per month, for a year, will suply their needy Wives, and little ones, with fuel. If you, as chief Magistrate of the Nation, will assure us, of our whole pay. We are content, our Patriotism, our enthusiasm will have a new impetus, to exert our energy more and more to aid Our Country. Not that our hearts ever flagged, in Devotion, spite the evident apathy displayed in our behalf, but We feel as though, our Country spurned us, now we are sworn to serve her.

Please give this a moments attention

James Henry Gooding

Corporal James Henry Gooding to Abraham Lincoln, 28 Sept. 1863, enclosed in [Harper & Brothers] to [Abraham Lincoln], 12 Oct. 1863, H-133 1863, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94.

2. Father of a New York Black Sergeant to the Secretary of War, Enclosing a Letter from His Son to an Unidentified Recipient

Scio Allegany County

State of New York Oct. 29th 1863.

Dr Sir I have a son now in the service of the U.S. who was drafted from this town in the month of July last. (he is colored.) and after

being taken from this place to rendezvous at Elmira was sent to Washington and is now First Duty Sargeant. (at Camp Casey) in Co. G. 2nd. U.S. colored troops. he has recd one month pay at \$7. now what I wish to know, is whether the sum of Seven dollars, per month is all that colored drafted men from this state are entitled to. my son supposed & so did I that he would receive the same pay, as white Soldiers he is a truly loyal Boy and says, he will serve his Country faithfully. but thinks there must be something wrong in relation to his receiving only Seven dollars per month. pay. I inclosed a letter, he wrote home, making inquiry as to the matter. your reply will settle the matter and will be appreciated, by, a colored man who, is willing to sacrafice his son in the cause of Freedom & Humanity Yours Very Respectfully

Aaron Peterson

[Enclosure] Camp Casey [D.C.] Oct 24 [1863] sir i take this Liberty to wright to you to let you no how soldiering goes with it all goes very well and i am content with every thing but my pay and i never can bee, contented untill i get my rits i am first duty sargt and my pay should bee 17 dolars a month and i think it is hard to bee abliged to poot up with sevan dolars i thought you might giv me some infamation about it if you will pleas rite to me i am willing to bee a soldier and serve my time faithful like a man but i think it is hard to bee poot off in sutch a dogesh maner as that

it haint enough to pay postage on my letters so i shall hav to send this with out a stamp for i haint money enough to buy a stamp

remember me to the boys Yours

Hiram A Peterson

7 dolars a month and half rations is rather hard

Excuse my boldnes but pleas answer this and obelege yours Sargt H A Peterson

Aaron Peterson to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 29 Oct. 1863, enclosing Hiram A. Peterson to Mr. Babcock, 24 Oct. [1863], P-98 1863, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94.

3. Commander of a Massachusetts Black Regiment to the Governor of Massachusetts

Morris Is. S C Nov. 23rd 1863 Governor. Copies of Your address, delivered to the Legislature of Massachusetts Nov. 11, 1863 have been recieved in this regiment. Such parts of it as reccommend the General Court to authorize the payment to the enlisted men of the 54th Mass. Vols. of that portion of the lawful

Monthly pay of United States Volunteers which has been or may be refused them by the Paymaster of the United States, are received unfavorably by the enlisted men of this Regiment. They were enlisted and mustered into the Service of the United States with the understanding that they would be treated in all respects as other Soldiers from Massachusetts. They will refuse to accept any money from the United States until the United States is willing to pay them according to the terms of their enlistment. They feel that by accepting a portion of their Just dues from Massachusetts and a portion from the United States, they would be acknowledging a right on the part of the United States to draw a distinction between them and other Soldiers from Massachusetts, and in so doing they would compromise their self respect. They enlisted because *men* were called for, and because the Government signified its willingness to accept them as such *not* because of the money offered them. They would rather work and fight until they are mustered out of the Service, without any pay than accept from the Government less than it gives to other soldiers from Massachusetts, and by so accepting acknowledge that because they have African blood in their veins, they are less men, than those who have saxon.

Thanking you in behalf of the men; for the kind spirit you have always manifested in your efforts to establish their Just rights I remain Very Respectfully. Your Obdt. Svt.

(Sgd) E. N. Hollowell

Col. E. N. Hollowell to Governor John A. Andrew, 23 Nov. 1863, Letters Sent, 54th Mass. Vols., Regimental Books & Papers USCT, RG 94.

4. Massachusetts Black Sergeant to the Adjutant General's Office

Morris Is S.C. Jan. 14, 1864
Sir I am a Sergeant of Co "F," 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers. I enlisted at Readville Mass, April 8th 1863, as a "volunteer from Massachusetts, in the force, authorized by an Act of congress of the United States, approved on the 22nd day of July, A.D. 1861, entitled, "An Act to authorize the employment of Volunteers to aid in enforcing the laws, and protecting public property." This act distinctly states in Section 5, That the officers, non commissioned officers, and privates, organized as above set forth, shall, in all respects, be placed on the footing, as to pay, and allowances, of similar corps of the Regular Army." I was accepted by the United States, and mustered in with the company to which I belong, April 23,

1863, by Lieut. Robert P. McKibbon, mustering officer; since that time I have performed the duty of a soldier, and have fulfilled my part of the contract with the Government. But the Government having failed to fulfill its part of the agreement, in as much as it refuses me the pay, and allowances of a Sergeant of the regular Army. I therefore, hereby respectfully demand to be mustered out of the service of the United States. I am Sir Very respectfully your Obt Servant

Stephen A. Swails

[Endorsement] Hd Qrs Dept of the South Hilton Head SC. Jan 23. 1864 Respectfully forwarded to A.G.O. The tone of this communication is disapproved

I have already, on a former occasion recommended that the Colored troops have the same pay and allowances provided by law for the white soldiers. I deem it important that such should be the Case— Q. A. Gillmore Maj Gen Com

1st Sergt. Stephen A. Swails to Colonel E. D. Townsend, 14 Jan. 1864, S-97 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94. Other endorsements by Swails's commanders, from the company through the district levels, simply approved and forwarded his request. Swails was later commissioned a lieutenant in the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers.

5. Black Sergeant to the Secretary of War

Fort Halleck Columbus—Ky.
Aprile 27th 1864

I Sir by way of Introduction was made 1st Sergeant of Co. C which was then denominated as 2nd Tenn Heavey Artillery now as 3d United States Heavey Artillery, as I wish to state to you, the facts which can be Relied, upon as I am fully able to prove if necessary I may say to you this Reg. is a coloured one of Southern Birth consequently have no Education, not so with my self I was Freeborn and Educated to some extent which makes me know we know that we have never had our Just Rights, by the Officers who command us, the white officers of other Reg. here persuaded me to Join when there were no Reg. of coloured here to Join so I consented and being the first to sign my name in this Reg. They promised to pay us the same wages as was paid the whites & Rations & clothing the same they have given us clothing & Rations sufficient for the time but have not paid us our Money according to promise the white privates tell us we Should get the same pay as they do but none of us has yet we never have been paid more

than Seven Dollars per Month they now say that is all we are allowd by the Government of the United States Many of these people have Families to support and no other means of doing it than what they get in this way. Such of those that are not able Bodied men are employed on Government work and are paid Ten Dollars per Month We who belong to this Reg. have done more work than they on Fatigue and other wise the very Labour that was appointed for them we have had to toil day and night when necessity demands it, I may say to you at the present our Regimental officers are nearly played out they have been Turned out and their places have not been furnished with other commanders now Hon. Secretary of war I wish to ask you not only for my own Satisfaction but at the Request of my Reg. is Seven Dollars per month all we Soldiers are to get or may we Expect in the final settlement to get our full Rights as was promiced us at the first

If we are to Recieve as much as White Soldiers or the Regular thirteen Dollars per Month then we Shall be Satisfied and on the field of Battle we will prove that we were worthy of what we claim for our Rights

With this Statement I may close by Requesting your Answer to this for the many Anxious and disappointed men of this reg. I am Sir your obedient Servant

Wm. J. Brown

PS) Direct yours to me in care of Co. C. 3d U States Heavey Arty. Care of Lieut. Adams of Co. A. 3d U. States Heavey Arty.

Wm. J. Brown to Honourable Secretary of War, 27 Apr. 1864, B-582 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94.

6. Soldiers of a Massachusetts Black Regiment to the President

Folly island South Carolina July 16th 18.64
Sir We The Members of Co D of the 55th Massachusetts vols Call the attention of your Excellency to our case

1st First We wase enlisted under the act of Congress of July 18.61 Placing the officers non Commissioned officers & Privates of the volunteer forces in all Respects as to Pay on the footing of Similar Corps of the Regular Army 2nd We Have Been in the Field now thirteen months & a Great many yet longer We have Recieved no Pay & Have Been offered only seven Dollars Pr month Which the Paymaster Has said was all He Had ever Been authorized to Pay Colored Troops this was not acording to our en-

PROLOGUE

listment Consequently We Refused the Money the Commonwealth of Massachusetts then Passed an act to make up all Deficiencies which the general Government Refused To Pay But this We Could not Recieve as The Troops in the general service are not Paid Partly By Government & Partly By State 3rd that to us money is no object we came to fight For Liberty justice & Equality. These are gifts we Prize more Highly than Gold For these We Left our Homes our Famileys Friends & Relatives most Dear to take as it ware our Lives in our Hands To Do Battle for God & Liberty

4th after the elaps of over thirteen months spent cheerfully & willingly Doing our Duty most faithfully in the Trenches Fatiegue Duty in camp and conspicuous valor & endurance in Battle as our Past History will Show

P 5th therefore we Deem these sufficient Reasons for Demanding our Pay from the Date of our inlistment & our imediate Discharge Having Been enlisted under False Prentence as the Past History of the Company will Prove

6th Be it further Resolved that if imediate steps are not takened to Relieve us we will Resort to more stringent mesures

We have the Honor to Remin your Obedint Servants The members of Co D

[74 signatures]

Sergt. John F. Shorter et al. to the President of the United States, 16 July 1864, L-211 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94. The names of five sergeants and six corporals are among the signatures. Most signers appear to have signed their own name.

7. Commander of a Massachusetts Black Regiment to the Governor of Massachusetts

Morris Island [S.C.] September 19. 1864

....

The men now expect to be paid according to the terms of their enlistment, about the first of October. I administered the following oath to them "You do solemnly swear that on or before the 19th day of April 1864 [1861], no man *had the right* to demand unrequited labor of you so help you God." None of them objected to taking the oath, and I mustered them accordingly. The Paymaster has written me he will bring the money to us in about two weeks, he has it all ready and is only waiting to make the necessary calculation upon the rolls. The men have been deceived so often in this matter, they are not willing to send the money home in the usual manner but say they would "rather have it in their own hands first." Adams Express Co has kindly promised to send an agent along with the Paymaster to receipt for such sums as they may conclude to send. Pay day will be our day of thanks giving and prayer, for we will have won a victory, as important to our race as the taking of Atlanta was to the nation.

....

(Sgd) E N Hollowell

Excerpt from Col. E. N. Hollowell to Governor John A. Andrew, 19 Sept. 1864, Letters Sent, 54th Mass. Vols., Regimental Books & Papers USCT, RG 94. Hollowell was white.